

THE AIR LINE

An Aeroplane Romance
Of Chinatown and Canada

By EDWIN BLISS

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Edgerton Abt, a famous aviator, explains his new machine, "The Comet," in New York for the benefit of Washburn, an Army Club millionaire. Abt is accompanied by a Chinaman, Dr. Wu, who claims to be a Chinaman's long ruler. Wu is eager to discuss a matter of great importance with Abt. The airplane and Washburn go to New York's Chinatown to meet him. Wu tells Abt a "long" war is brewing and that he is doing all he can to avert it. But his lieutenant, Mock Duck, who could be toward calming the angry factions in Canada, and the Federal authorities won't let him return to the United States. Wu offers Abt \$10,000 to smuggle the Chinaman from Canada to New York in his airplane, the Comet. Abt accepts, later he has reason to believe that Wu was lying about his motive for wanting Mock Duck brought to New York.

CHAPTER VIII.

(Continued.)

The Necessity for Mock Duck.

SANDY peeked furtively at the dimly lighted room. He could see from the nature of the sleepy little hamlet that such a jail would be entirely adequate to meet the demands of the town. Also, he imagined that the people did not take kindly to building a place for the housing of malefactors from a different country than their own. But he knew, from what he had seen and heard, that this jail was now as strong as it was possible for any jail to be—having as warden the man who was supposed to be the greatest special agent of the Treasury Department of the United States.

Quickly the pair left the town and headed toward the race track. Here, Dutch Fred leading, they made a straight course for the empty grand stand, and climbing to the top were able to obtain a view of the town and its environs. Sandy now attempted to engage the other in conversation, but soon saw that the presence of the special agent hovered over the man's mind to the exclusion of everything else. The musician's big eyes traveled restlessly in every direction, but always came back to the tiny jail which was plainly visible from their high perch.

Sandy amused himself at first by trying to locate the Comet; then, this failing, in seeking out the motor in which he had last seen Wells. Gradually, with the boiling sun of late afternoon, premonitions of disaster filled his torpid brain. The strange words of the special agent came back to him with many meanings, into which he had not taken the trouble to inquire before. He found himself dubious of the Comet's success. What if the aeroplane had been unable to negotiate the flight? What if Abt really had been doing his best in his recent flights and had simply put on this crust of bravado as a pretense to cover up the deficiency of his machine?

Finally he drowsed off into a long slumber, from which he was awakened by a touch on his arm. He started up wide awake, alive in an instant to the thing on hand. The twilight was coming on swiftly and little vapor clouds rose in every direction. Lake Erie expanded out of the little ribbon of Niagara River to the right, heavily blue. In fancy he could hear the rumbling of the falls. Lights were beginning to gleam in the windows of Hamarville, and as he followed the direction of the musician's outstretched finger he made out the ominous darkness of the flimsy jail.

"I can't understand it," perplexedly muttered Dutch Fred. "About two hours ago I caught a glimpse of Wells in his car; then he speeded out of sight again without even stopping at the jail. What's his game?" Washburn slowly rose and jerked the kinks from his muscles which had come from sleeping on the hard ground. He was sick and tired of games, weary of the whole business. Wells did not bother him nearly so much now as the continued absence of Abt and his plot.

He knew that it was up to him to aid this derelict of Chinatown to deliver Mock Duck from the jail, but it all seemed so needless when he had not yet seen the Comet, and did not even know where it was. He mentioned something of this to his companion and was surprised to mark the twinkle in that gentleman's brooding eyes.

Without saying a word, Dutch Fred made his way to the ground, called Washburn to his side and pointed out over the field to the top of the plateau in the distance. Slowly before Sandy's astonished gaze a tiny light gleamed high in the air and held stationary, then another, and he made out the white, dove-like planes of the Comet.

"Has he been here at all?" queried Sandy, irritated with himself for sleeping and with Abt for not having awakened him.

"For no more than a minute," responded the pianist. "He had me guarding his precious machine while he hustled down to the depot to look for a message from Dr. Wu."

"What message?" growled Washburn.

"The name of the bank where that hundred thousand dollars was to be deposited," chuckled Dutch Fred. "It seems to be all he cares about. He said if the message wasn't there he wouldn't do a thing."

"Then it was there?"

Again the man chuckled, but this time without mirth. "It had been

there, so the operator said. Wells, from the description, took it; showed his badge, and told the man to forget what the contents were."

"Well?"

"It made Abt so hot he said he'd take a chance, anyway. I think, though, the fact that a message had been there made the difference. Wells evidently wants to use it for evidence."

Again Washburn experienced that peculiarly clammy feeling clutching at his spine which he had noticed at times when listening to the agent. However, the spirit of the adventure was strong within him. The sight of the little Comet over on the plateau, the readiness of the man at his side for the adventure, the little jail with its precious yellow burden—the whole thing seemed more of a lark than anything else. Then, too, the sick, irritating methods of this man Wells aroused all the antagonism within him. He glanced impatiently at the musician, and the man nodded.

In silence they walked to the broken-down fence and made a straight course toward the town. No one passed them, for it was supper hour, and they could see through the windows of some of the houses the families seated at their tables. The domesticity of the whole scene, the tinkle of cow bells, the barking of a watchdog in a front yard as they passed, all struck Washburn as curiously incongruous with his own purpose, the means whereby he wished to effect that purpose, and the man opposed to him—the man with the unfathomable methods.

Dutch Fred did not skulk or hesitate along the way. If he did not speak it was because, as Sandy could see, his mind was taken up with the problem of where Wells might be and what the agent was doing. At last the little jail loomed out of the dusk, and they could hear loud voices from within. The musician tugged at Sandy's sleeve and drew him close under the barred windows, where the words came clearly through the thin partitions of the structure.

Sandy suddenly clutched the pianist's arm in a tight grip, as he caught Wells's voice, lowered in deep disappointment.

"I wanted to get the fellows," the special agent was saying, "but you see the message yourself. That's the trouble working for the Government—they're after the main chance all the time. I'm recalled, and there's no disobeying an order like this."

The answer came to them grumblingly, and mumbled so that the words were indistinct.

"It's Meehan, the town jailer," whispered Dutch Fred excitedly. "Wells is recalled."

Though they waited fully half an hour longer they heard nothing more, save occasionally the growing voice of the jailer. Not daring to make the slightest sound, they crouched low against the side of the jail till, finally, a long streak of light showed at one side of them. Sandy moved toward the light and peered his head cautiously around the corner. The light was coming from the open jail door. Wells stood framed in the doorway, staring impatiently into the night. He whistled shrilly, and was answered by the dull rumbling of an automobile. In a second the same huge car Sandy had last seen at the station in Buffalo rolled up close enough for him to touch it by moving a couple of steps forward. In the driver's seat was the same chauffeur he had noticed and marked for a Frenchman.

Wells sauntered forward and started to open the door, when the jailer, a short, heavy-set man, placed his hand on his sleeve and muttered a few words. The special agent merely smiled, clambered into the car, and gave sharp, curt instructions to the driver. The man at once started the machine, and the car bounded away down the road.

Meehan went back into the jail, but came out again in a moment, jangling a bunch of keys. He slowly and laboriously looked up the place, then sauntered in the direction the car had taken.

Washburn crawled stealthily back and told Dutch Fred what had happened. It all seemed so simple, so easy, to his practical mind that he feared a hidden motive. He was a little astonished to find that the musician did not share his misgivings. Meehan had simply gone home to supper, that was all. This was not a city jail; and, further, being fully versed in everything pertaining to this special one, Dutch Fred was not even surprised that the jailer should leave it deserted.

Casting all caution to the winds, they boldly stepped to the door and tried it. A frail thing at best, it was but the work of a second to locate the hinges, and when Sandy had thrown his great bulk against the lock a few times there was an easy victor over the wooden door.

"We'll have to work fast," said Dutch Fred. "Meehan always comes back to look things over, and I want Mock Duck well out of the way before the alarm is given, because Wells might come back, too, if he heard of the break. As for the natives, they don't give a hang if a dozen Chinks get

His Ear to the Ground

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By J. H. Cassel



loose. In fact, they'd rather have them out of the town than in it." He poked his head inquisitively against the slender iron bars of the three cells the jail possessed, going from one to another, then back again. "That's funny," he finally muttered. "I've watched the place all day, and he hasn't been removed."

"Call," suggested Washburn. Fred raised his voice in unintelligible gabblings of Chinese, but still there was no answer. Suddenly Sandy made out a dark shadow from under one of the little iron cots, and called the musician's attention to it. Fred thrust his nose against the bars and exploded in a perfect fury of Chinese. Slowly, fearfully, the thing that had cast the shadow crept to the bars, and Washburn felt a curious repulsion overwhelm him.

He had no time, however, to dwell on the bleary-eyed, pig-tailed yellow-skinned thing that faced him, for his companion, evidently prepared for just this emergency, had drawn a short, steel jimmy from his pocket, and was desperately wrenching at the wooden base of the door beneath the bars. Sandy lent assistance right manfully, and in a few moments they had torn it loose. With the bars now free at the bottom, it was not difficult to bend them far enough apart to make an opening sufficiently wide for the prisoner's egress.

This accomplished, they dragged out the Chinaman, and the three beat a hasty retreat.

As the cool air laved Sandy's throat a realization of what he had done came upon him for the first time; also the sickening thought of what a beastly little yellow-skinned he had done it for. They slackened their pace when a safe distance from the jail and slowed down to a walk. Dutch Fred was ahead, jabbering what were obviously directions to Mock Duck, who was a little behind him.

Suddenly before them loomed a huge rock. The three men stopped, and the musician and Chinaman looked meaningfully at each other, and then at Washburn. Dutch Fred, after a heated confab with the Chinaman, turned regretfully to Sandy.

"It isn't very far to the Comet," he suggested. "We'd better have her here ready for an emergency. Could you go and bring Abt?"

Washburn looked toward the place where he had last seen the twin lights. They were now in motion. Lastly they gleamed for a second, dipping and swaying like languid shooting stars. Then they grew more distinct and he finally saw that they were headed in their direction. He started to explain this to his companion, and realized in a flash, from the expression on that gentleman's face, that they wanted to get rid of him, and in a flash, too, he decided that they would do no such thing. After he had somewhat forcibly explained this to them, the two men held another conversation, not a word of which he could make out, and then, shrugging his shoulders, the Chinaman seemed to give in.

Washburn watched the men curiously. Dutch Fred seemed the one of inaction now, while Mock Duck bustled

relied strolled to the rock and, crouching low, began to crawl about its base. Suddenly he emitted a little guttural cry of delight, and the musician sprang forward. In a second the pair were making the dirt fly, using no spade but nature's weapons, and making an extremely good job of it, at that. Sandy was growing nervous. No hidden thing was in the contract he had heard made between the tongue chief and Abt. He began to piece together the things the special agent had said of the cunning of the Heathen Chinese.

Suddenly he caught the glitter of something directly before him. Instinctively he stepped forward, then fell back with a little exclamation of wonder, indignation, delight, and chagrin. For in Mock Duck's hands gleamed—even in the night—hundreds of diamonds! The pianist, holding a large buckskin belt, was gently shaking its contents into the waiting palms of the man he had just rescued. Together the two men knelt—utterly oblivious to the wondering American, and hurriedly counted over the gems. Sandy had never seen so many diamonds before in his whole life. He was dazed at the very sight of them all. Slowly the men finished the count and carefully returned the stones to the long, flat belt. Mock Duck hurriedly uncoiled his clothing and strapped it tightly next to his skin, then stared malevolently at the gaping Washburn.

So this was what the special agent had meant when he said that half of Wu's words were lies; this was what he meant when he said that it was not so much Mock Duck who was wanted as what Mock Duck would have upon his person; this was what he meant when he casually inquired where a hundred thousand dollars could be raised in an instant! The credulity with which he had allowed himself to be duped maddened Sandy; the thought that he had made a jail-breaker of himself—a consort of thieves and smugglers and dirty Chinamen—nauseated him. He looked up overhead. The lights of the Comet were coming closer. Then he smiled. He could yet apprise Abt of what the game really was and so nullify the contract. Something scratched the nape of his neck, and the smile froze on his lips; something like icy fingers travelled rapidly up and down his spine.

"What's that?" he gasped. "That," drawled the lazy voice of Wells from directly behind him, "is the muzzle of a business-like gun. It is scratching your neck so you may be quite certain it is not a baby rattle."

Sandy looked in astonishment at the two desperate smugglers, then a slow grin overspread his features and he laughed. For they stood as though rooted to the spot, and he realized from the fixity of terror painted on their countenances that they were likewise covered.

CHAPTER IX.

The Wager.

It was the first time in Washburn's life by no means limited career that he had ever been introduced to the scratch of a revolver muzzle at the point where it

was calculated by nature to do the most good; yet, curiously enough, he felt rather overjoyed and amused. The situation struck him as a sort of triumph of the Caucasian race over the yellow, and since he himself was crowned with no laurels, he enjoyed the sensation of seeing another of his own breed have them. Also it saved him from the disagreeable necessity of creating a large solid row. In fact he was really relieved to have the entire matter taken out of his hands.

A decided antipathy had been aroused within him the instant he set eyes on this man Mock Duck. And as he studied him now he felt a tingle of rapture at the turn the cards had taken. The fellow's thick lips were hung loosely on a degenerate face; his oblique eyes were red and bleary, the very acme of cheap cunning; his forehead was low and bestial, surmounted by coarse hair that came down almost to his eyebrows in a broad peak.

Sandy almost forgot his own predicament as he watched the Chinaman quake and tremble; forgot that he himself was taken in the act of conniving at smuggling, immediately after having broken into a jail. But, in a trice, this all came back to him, as the revolver again pressed roughly into his neck.

The voice of Wells, low, drawling, gentle, broke the strained silence. "Now, Duck," murmured the agent, "if you will kindly loosen your clothes and pass the diamonds over it would be a great favor to me."

Washburn dared not stir, but he gazed over the rebellion glittering in the narrow, side eyes of the Mongolian.

"Really, Fred," continued the drawling voice, with just a touch of mocking gallantry in it, "I thought better of you than this. The trick is so old it appears to have become new. It has bothered me a great deal to know where the stones were, and here you lead me to them the very first thing. A wretched good of you, indeed." Abruptly his voice changed and became steely sharp, like the crack of a whip. "Come, Mock Duck, did you hear me? Throw the belt on the ground instantly or I'll blow you to Kingdom Come!"

The fellow's thick lips trembled, and in a whining, singsong voice he protested his ignorance of English. Wells laughed softly, then a torrent of Chinese fell from his lips. Sandy did not understand the words, but watching Mock Duck's face in its changes of expression he could not fail to catch their meaning.

Slowly the fellow's hands fell to his blouse. More slowly yet he loosened the drawstring, and then after a long time the belt dropped to the ground and lay, a sinuous, snakey thing at his feet.

Sandy noticed that Wells made no motion to take it up; noticed too the gripping and ungrinding of the Chinaman's deadly, long fingers, as his eyes rested irresistibly on the thing. A low chuckle came from the depths of his throat and was answered by another from the man behind him.

"Mr. Washburn," said the special agent softly, "I wonder if you are as

big a dupe as I surmised on the train coming up."

"Is there any doubt of that?" responded Sandy. For a moment there was silence, then gradually the tight feeling at the nape of Washburn's neck departed, but still he could feel it as a most disagreeable memory. Finally he turned and looked at the special agent—and caught his breath. He had not imagined such a transformation possible in a man without the use of disguise.

Wells's face was hard as adamant. His eyes were narrowed down until little more than the pupils showed; his mouth was drawn together so tightly the lips were but a thin, white line; his jawbones stood out prominently and square; and his body was rigid and dominating. Then, for the first time, Sandy understood the terror created in the men before him, and understood too the fear inspired in Dr. Wu at mere mention of the agent's name. He found it in his heart to inquire with wonder what necessity there was for the man to carry even a single revolver, let alone the two now levelled at Dutch Fred and Mock Duck.

Wells's eyes never strayed for an instant from the two men; his gaze never even travelled toward the belt lying at the Chinaman's feet. At last a low laugh came from his throat, while a sneer curled his lips. He made a curious little clucking sound with his lips—a pitying noise, it seemed to Sandy. "And you, Mock Duck, imagined for one second that you would be fool enough to pick up that belt, or allow you to hand it to me!" Again he laughed, then nodded his head toward Washburn. "I think you're a pretty decent sort, Mr. Washburn. I absolve you from blame in this matter. Am I right?"

Sandy nodded shortly. It angered him even to have the man think him a party to smuggling operations in such company. He felt an overwhelming desire to explain his scientific and humanitarian interest in the plan of Dr. Wu, but words failed.

"Kindly pick up that belt and cram it in my coat pocket," continued the special agent, placidly. "I have no desire to have the fingers of that Chinaman around my neck, nor do I particularly care to bother with the knife Fred is trying to work out of his pocket." He laughed harshly as the musician's hand fell to his side, like a schoolboy caught in the act of passing a note.

Washburn, after a moment's hesitation, as he felt the glittering, beady eyes of the Chinaman upon him and watched the terribly long, thin, yellow fingers, knelt down and picked up the heavy belt, then placed it carefully in the special agent's pocket. Rich man though he was, he could not even handle the thing without a thrill, having seen the precious contents. But Wells never so much as moved an eyelid.

"And now," said Wells, "I have managed very nicely with my part of this affair. The Government will be really pleased with this coup. In fact," he laughed, "it stands a good chance of eating up more of Doctor Wu's past profits than our friend will care to think about. I"—He stopped suddenly, and Washburn felt the quiver that made the revolvers in his hands sway slightly from side to side. From above them a perfect roar was sounding—not the roar of thunder, nor any other of heaven's natural artillery, but the explosion of the Comet's engine. For an instant it was almost deafening;

then there was silence. Sandy raised his eyes inquiringly aloft. Slowly the great, fluttering thing dipped downward toward them.

Again the explosions broke out and the white-plated Comet, once more a thing of intricate machinery and less the natural bird, swooped gently down within ten feet of them, and Edgerton Abt emerged from his seat and rushed up to where they stood.

"Well, well, well, Washburn!" he demanded brusquely. "What's all this row about?" He nodded his head toward the special agent.

"Wells," explained Sandy dolefully, Edgerton Abt turned wrathfully upon the man in the pilot's seat. "You stole my friend's car!" he cried.

"Guilty," pleaded the special agent briefly. Washburn laid a restraining hand on Abt's arm, but Wells only growled. "Mr. Abt," he cried out sharply, "you are in my line of fire!"

"But—but—but"—stammered Abt. "This is outrageous! What do you mean by this intimidation, sir? What do you?"

"Never mind, Mr. Abt," quietly responded Wells, never removing his eyes for an instant from the pair of malefactors. "I can attend to my part in this affair."

"Prevent my flight!"—fumed the invader. "This Mock Duck is a smuggler for Wu," Washburn interrupted. "Mr. Wells has just taken away a belt filled with diamonds from him which he expected to carry across the line."

"Quite so," ably responded the agent. "We apprehended Duck here on the border—I chanced to receive word of his purchases. But he managed to secure the stones, some way or other. I was not on hand at the time, and perhaps that explains it. Therefore, I welcomed the jail delivery, knowing the first thing done before boarding any sort of airship, or anything else, would be to recover the stones themselves. I have had that pleasure, and now—"

Abt waved a dictatorial hand toward him. "About my telegram?" he demanded. "The operator told me you stole that, too. Young man, you mean to be something of a kleptomaniac?"

Wells smiled grimly. "Ah, yes, the message. I was intending to use that as evidence against you. However, it seems to be unnecessary now as I have the stones. You will find it in my left-hand breast pocket. But I think you must give up your plans for flight with my prisoner."

Washburn stepped forward at a nod, took out the strip of paper Abt, whose face broke into a thousand ripples of delight as he read its contents. The little aviator responded back to Washburn. It was passed it back to Abt's credit in the Atlas Bank of New York, the subject to his order on the carrying out of a certain verbal agreement.

Wells looked at Wells, an amused smile curving the corners of his mouth. "One hundred thousand dollars," he said mildly. "I presume you heard the terms of the contract talked over when you were exchanging papers with me. You certainly do not expect to take that along with everything you stuff your fingers have rested on."

Wells's eyes brightened. "As a matter of fact," he returned, "it makes little difference to me, one way or another, whether you fly away with this gentleman or not. I have the diamonds. However, I should advise you not to bother with him."

"Confound it, Mr. Washburn, in exasperation, 'I'm bothering with a hundred thousand dollars—not a Chinaman!'"

Wells grinned. "Then, suppose I say no. What would happen?"

Abt's eyes glittered ominously, while one hand reached gropingly for his revolver which he twisted till it seemed about to be jerked out by the root.

"Then," he said very quietly, "I should mathematically figure that there were four men against one, and that the odds were a hundred to one."

Man to man they stood, Wells, while never taking his eyes from the dangerous pair, seemed brooding over a problem. Abt's whole manner was suggestive of the earnestness which he felt.

"Mr. Washburn seems to be on the side of decency," suggested the agent placidly. "Sandy hurriedly objected. As his eyes rested on the beautiful aeroplane but a few yards behind the group he was reassured with the old overwhelming desire to see what it could do at its best."

"I was only against smuggling," Wells explained. "I did not know what it was going into, and I thought it remained to all intents and purposes the same as before—can an aerial distance carry a passenger a practical distance? That is what I am interested in now. You say yourself that you have what you started after—'a diamond' and a woman's hand. Then Mr. Abt taking this man with those diamonds on his person. In fact, I should have stopped it. Now, it is an error."

"The man is a smuggler and amenable to the laws of the United States," snapped the agent. "I am not interested in the money, but I am interested in the man. Why couldn't you just as well have nabbed him in New York if you wanted to prosecute? I want to see what he can do with the aeroplane. And I," snarled Abt angrily, went to get that hundred thousand dollars, and there isn't anybody I know of who's stable enough to stop me." Wells laughed an ugly, snarling laugh, a worried frown crossed his face as Abt slipped stealthily to his left and moved forward. Washburn watched the fellow's eyes, and saw that they went to his hip pocket, then swiftly emerged, and Sandy caught the glint of a gun.

"Washburn," snapped Abt, "I'm not going to be cheated out of this hundred thousand dollars; it means everything to me. What are you going to do?"

He waited expectantly for a reply. Sandy revolved the whole thing rapidly in his brain, but could come to no other conclusion than the one he had started out with. He wanted to see the Comet carry a passenger, and he wanted to see it through. Not for a flash had he broken a jail open to deliver a Chinaman! He looked again at Wells and noted the way he was following Abt's movements out of the tail of his eye.

"No, sir," continued Abt, the words

NEXT WEEK'S COMPLETE NOVEL IN THE EVENING WORLD

GARRYOWEN

By H. DEVERE STACPOOLE

Author of "DRUMS OF WAR," ETC.

bitten off venomously: "I won't be stopped! I've labored for this moment. I've worked. I've conquered things that make those gentlemen you're covering with a gun look cheap and insignificant. I've labored for a chance. I've solved the problem. I have the means, and I'm after the end. You don't suppose I'm going to be balked by anything, do you?"

With a sudden motion he slipped forward and raised the revolver. Washburn suddenly fell back where the special agent's eye could not catch him, and waited for what was to come next.

"I've got you covered," snarled Abt viciously. "I'm ready for action now. Where are the diamonds, Washburn?"

Sandy patted his own right-hand coat pocket significantly. Abt nodded shortly. "I knew where the diamonds were. Wells growled. 'I've had many an ugly dog to tame down in the mountains. I've had spies on my trail, and I've had drunken, ugly mechanics. But I've conquered them all. I've worked for this minute, and there isn't going to be any robbing me of it. I don't want the money alone; I want to show the world what I've got. Do you think for an instant that I'm beaten by a man I've got covered? I'll count three, and you think it over and be ready to tell me what you propose to do. I know what my idea is.'"

"One minute," said Wells easily, bringing his gun in a short circle to subdue the growing courage of Dutch Fred and Mock Duck. "You have me pat—that's right. It isn't in the nature of things for me to fight four, although I don't believe you'll shoot."

Abt laughed—barked, rather. "I don't know but that it would be better that way. You couldn't talk so much, you know."

"Well," announced Wells resignedly, "it's as I keep the diamonds and wait for the time. You take your chances, eh? You take the man away."

Washburn choked with glee at the capitulation.

"That's fair," allowed Edgerton Abt. "Though you get the best of everything."

Wells laughed softly. "Quite so. To tell the truth, I would much rather set the New York Secret Service on this precious outfit of smugglers than do the thing myself. It's special agent work to recover stones, and secret service work to do little deporting jobs."

"You seem pretty certain of your self," grinned Abt.

"I know myself," answered Wells. "However, I should advise you to make this flight shortly, as Washburn here has been amusing himself breaking his ankles such a while."

Abt rubbed his nose. "I don't side while his pale blue eyes clouded perplexedly. 'I forgot about that,' he muttered. 'What about Washburn? That's the question.'"

He looked at the Chinaman and Dutch Fred, still cowering under the pair of guns in the agent's hands, and made a grimace of disgust.

"See how Wells," he said. "I want that hundred thousand dollars more than anything else I can think of at the present moment. I am a poor man, and the idea of a hundred thousand country seems to be that everything I have done toward the conquering of the air belongs to the world. If it does, then I'll take it."

For the rest of my natural days. Now, see here, with a hundred thousand dollars I can borrow enough capital to do it up. I can coin money with my patents and multiples—that's why I want it so badly. I'm too old to start on anything else. I want to live. I want to live a hundred years and see me—twenty-five years snatched from my existence. I'm not keen on hauling this Mock Duck to New York, especially since I know that he was trying to frame up a smuggling deal and make me a party to it. He was willing to do a hundred thousand dollars for the thing at any stage."

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Again his hand sought his nose, and his pudgy face wrinkled perplexedly. "But," he repeated slowly, "Sandy Washburn has stood by me. He's a good sport, and I never saw a man who stood by me yet. I don't care a hang about Dutch Fred, nor Dr. Wu, but I do care about Sandy. Here, I won't leave my friend to answer any jail-breaking charges. I'll take him, instead of the Chinaman. If you say the word, it's up to you."

"Up to me?" queried Wells in surprise. "I don't."

"You do, and you know you do," snapped Edgerton Abt irritably. "You can take Washburn over the line and get him through, sweet and clean as the day he was born, with never a hint of busting little Canuck falls; and what's more, you're any sort of a good sport, and I never saw a man who stood by me yet. I don't care a hang about Dutch Fred, nor Dr. Wu, but I do care about Sandy. Here, I won't leave my friend to answer any jail-breaking charges. I'll take him, instead of the Chinaman. If you say the word, it's up to you."

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